

Welcoming the world: Rwanda to start issuing visas on arrival for all countries

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Global citizens, prepare to pack your bags to visit Rwanda. The country has announced that effective from 1 January 2018, nationals of all countries will get a visa upon arrival without prior application, as part of the establishment of a new visa regime.



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A communique released by the Directorate of Immigration and Emigration stated that citizens of all countries will get 30 days visa on arrival under the regime. Before that, only passport holders from African countries and a few other countries were getting visas upon arrival at Rwanda entry points. With some entrants required to pay a fee where applicable.

The communique also stated that Rwandans with dual nationality are now allowed to use National IDs on entry. This will waive visa fees for Rwandans coming into the country travelling on foreign passports in possession of a Rwandan ID for countries that permit dual nationality only.

On a reciprocal basis, the country will also grant visa free of charge with 90 days validity to these countries: Benin, Central African Republic, Chad, Ghana, Guinea, Indonesia, Haiti, Senegal, Seychelles and Sao Tome and Principe. This is in addition to the Democratic Republic of Congo, East Africa Member Community Partner States, Mauritius, Philippines and Singapore. This takes immediate effect, the communique read.

The comprehensive new visa regime also outlines visa waiver for some diplomatic and service passport holders, a directive which takes immediate effect. The countries include Djibouti, Ethiopia, Gabon, Guinea, India, Israel, Morocco and Turkey. The communique also states that a 90-day visa on arrival for travellers from the COMESA (The Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa) region subject to payment of visa fees.

New visa regime a big step to boost tourism, open business opportunities

The new visa regime is a big step, which will boost tourism and open other business opportunities for the country because of the easy access by foreign nationals visiting the country.

The development comes at a time when the African Union (AU) is encouraging member state to liberalise free movement of citizens across the continent. Rwanda is among the countries which have taken a leading role in implementing the AU's recommendations. The country is reputed as one of the most open in visa openness index publications.

According to the African Development Bank (AfDB) Index, Africa remains largely closed off to African travellers and on average. "Africans need visas to travel to 55% of other African countries, can get visas on arrival in only 25% of other countries and don't need a visa to travel to just 20% of other countries on the continent." However, this reality is changing as some countries are beginning to show their commitment to calls to open up their borders to the rest of the continent.

The AU has continued its calls for countries to review their visa policies to "implement mechanisms allowing for the issuing of visas on arrival for citizens of Member States, with the possibility of a 30-day stay".

Last month Nigeria started issuing visas-on-arrival to African citizens visiting the country in accordance with the AU recommendation. The development was applauded by Africans across the continent as a major step towards the goal of encouraging free movement on the continent.

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